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ABSTRACT

The hybrid basic communication course is a popular alternative to a straight public speaking course. The strengths of the hybrid communication course are in the breadth of coverage of communication skills in the course, its comprehensive orientation to teaching multiple communication skills, and its potential to provide students with opportunities to learn different skills for differing communication situations. The necessity of identifying and then teaching appropriate communication competencies to students is the central role for faculty in basic communication courses. A lack of research has been and continues to be the major downfall for the ongoing development of a coherent, research-based basic course program on any campus. Some major concerns are maintaining consistency across sections of the basic course, the size of the classes, the amount of time available for assignments, and support budget for the course. Research must be conducted on what is done in the basic course, specifically the hybrid course. Perhaps nothing has the potential to impact on the hybrid course (and other basic communication courses) more than the continuing evolution of new technologies. To assess students' competencies in the hybrid course, instructors and course directors need specific measures that are both valid and reliable. Using the best instructors to teach basic communication courses and conducting research on the basic communication course are essential as educators move towards and into the 21st century. (Contains 22 references.) (RS)

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THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY:

CONTINUED EVOLUTION OF THE HYBRID COURSE

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THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY:

CONTINUED EVOLUTION OF THE HYBRID COURSE

The hybrid or blend basic communication course is a popular alternative to a straight public speaking course (Gibson, *et al.*, 1970; Gibson, *et al.*, 1974; Gibson, *et al.*, 1980; Gibson, *et al.*, 1985; Gibson, *et al.*, 1990). Many faculty and basic course directors understand the inherent and added value of including different and multiple communication contexts in the beginning course in communication skill development. Pearson and West (1991) stated, "The hybrid course may vary from campus to campus. ... Nonetheless, the large number of popular texts which creatively combine several communication contexts suggest that the hybrid course is fairly homogenous" (p. 17). Others, too, understand and recognize the value of the hybrid course for basic communication skill development. Trank and Lewis (1991) concluded, "The blend or combination course is a popular option across all types of institutions and is reported as the most popular approach in the MA granting institutions" (p. 108).

Teaching communication skills in the interpersonal, group, interviewing, public speaking, and other communication contexts seems a good starting point for the student taking only one communication course. Focusing on just public speaking skills leaves out many other important communication contexts. Students need specific communication skill development in many, if not

all, of these contexts. There is no agreement on this issue among teachers in or directors of basic communication courses about what skills or contexts that ought to be included in the basic communication course. There is no leadership from the Speech Communication Association guiding instruction in any specific direction regarding the mission of or content in the basic communication course either. Seiler and McGukin (1989) concluded, "No agreement could be reached as to what the basic course is or what course best represents it!" (p. 29). These disagreements were evident at the Midwest Basic Course Directors Conference in 1996 when participants could not agree on a set of specific communication skill competencies for students in any basic course.

It is not sufficient to suggest that the skills we teach in the introductory public speaking course, or for that matter any basic communication course, translate to other communication contexts beyond graduation. Bendtschneider and Trank (1990) agreed, "Obviously, students need the skills which have been identified by experienced faculty as those necessary to help them succeed in their academic course work. However, they also need communication skills which will carry over after graduation to ensure success in their chosen professions" (p. 187). Communication educators only minimally agree on what communication skill development programs ought to be part of the basic communication course. Suggesting that public speaking skills provide these needed skills is not an accurate conclusion.

In the public speaking course, how are we noting any skill transference beyond the classroom experience of the student to their career?

As a result, a broader repertoire of skills for varying contexts seems an appropriate for the beginning or introductory course in communication skills. Seiler (1993) agreed, "Because of the diversified nature and the multi-plural society we are living in, the hybrid course has the flexibility and structure to adapt to change than any of the other introductory speech communication courses" (p. 56). Pearson and West (1991) concurred, "Since the introductory course serves as the sole exposure to the communication field, it is imperative that the course be as comprehensive as possible" (p. 29). They continue their argument for the hybrid communication course, "The hybrid course has a diversified portfolio and is more likely to survive in uncertain times than are the individually invested courses we teach" (Pearson and West, 1991, p. 31). The strengths of the hybrid communication course are in the breadth of coverage of communication skills in the course, its comprehensive orientation to teaching multiple communication skills, and its potential to provide students with opportunities to learn, albeit at an introductory level, different skills for differing communication situations.

With the hybrid course remaining the second most popular option for basic communication course programs around the country, those of us interested in the hybrid course are ready to

increase program interest and student demand. Pearson and West (1991) reported, "A survey of college students and alumni found that, regardless of the nature of the introductory course experienced, both students and alumni believed the hybrid course to be most appropriate (Pearson, Sorenson, & Nelson, 1981)" (p. 28).

The Hybrid Communication Course: Background

The foundations for the hybrid communication course rely on the notion that students need to learn interpersonal communication skills, group leadership and group participation skills in addition to public speaking skills. Seiler (1993) concluded, "In fact, surveys of alumni (DiSalvo, 1980; Pearson, Sorenson, & Nelson, 1981) have consistently found that interpersonal communication, giving information and making decisions with another person, or providing information to groups of individuals to be more important than strictly public skills" (p. 51).

Communication Skills: Student Needs

The necessity of identifying and then teaching appropriate communication competencies to students is the central role for faculty in basic communication courses. Shamefully, faculty frequently rely on their own views of these communication skills.

Although faculty views need to be incorporated into any basic course program, results of other research studies are available to guide us in our selection of specific skills needed by undergraduate students before their graduation.

For example, Curtis, *et al.* (1989) discovered a listing of abilities deemed desirable in new managers. Seiler (1993), in summarizing the results of this study, reported:

> In a more recent study, 1000 personnel managers representing corporate, service, financial, government, insurance, retail and wholesale organizations were asked which skills are the most important in helping graduating college students obtain employment. The top three skills were oral communication, listening ability, and enthusiasm. The same personnel managers indicated that the abilities that young managers need include:
>
> 1. To work well with others, one-on-one
> 2. To gather accurate information from others to make a decision
> 3. To work well in small groups
> 4. To listen effectively and give counsel
> 5. To give effective feedback (Curtis, Windsor, & Stephens, 1989). (p. 52)

Interestingly, the notion that beginning communication courses, those founded on the principles of teaching applicable communication skills, should be broad in nature and not too context specific in scope is not new. Over thirty years ago, Dedmon (1965) wrote, "Our traditional approaches have blinded us to the real objective of the required first [basic] course: To teach a general education course in oral communication" (p. 125). Pearson and West (1991), in reviewing Dedmon's statement, concluded, "The hybrid course answers Dedmon's call to action" (p. 32).

The importance of teaching basic communication skills beyond or in addition to public speaking is reiterated in all national college and university accrediting agencies (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, New England Association of Colleges and Schools, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools). The skills highlighted in their reports and guidelines include interpersonal (relational) communication skills, group decision making and leadership skills, listening skills, and presentational (public speaking skills).

The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (1994) suggested, "If a general education program is based on cognitive experiences, it will typically describe its programs in terms of the college-level experiences that engender such competencies as: capabilities in reading, writing, speaking, listening" (p. 21).

The Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (1994) guidelines stated, "General education introduces students to the content and methodology of the major areas of knowledge -- the humanities, the fine arts, the natural sciences -- and helps them to develop the mental skills that will make them more effective learners. ... Programs of study ... must contain a recognizable body of instruction in program-related areas of 1) communication, 2) computation, and 3) human relationships" (p. 57). The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (1992) indicated that, "Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English" (p. 12). The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (1992) concluded, "Within this core [of general education courses], or in addition to it, the institution must provide components designed to ensure competence in reading, writing, oral communication and fundamental mathematical skills" (p. 24). Finally, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (1994) pointed out, "Programs and courses which develop general intellectual skills such as the ability to form independent judgment, to weigh values, to understand fundamental theory, and to interact effectively in a culturally diverse world" (p. 4).

The emphasis on oral communication skill development by each accrediting agency highlights one of the most important problems facing communication educators of beginning oral communication skills. The issue is for colleges and universities to develop programs in oral communication skills where students learn

necessary skills and receive helpful assessment of these skills throughout their undergraduate educational careers.

The problem and all its tendrils was, and remains, that we have little if any research, beyond opinions of authors or course directors, to document whether students' communication skills develop as a result of their enrollment in the basic communication course. Seiler and McGukin (1989) stated clearly the exact problem, "Little research, however, has examined the effectiveness of instruction and practice in developing students' competence" (p. 31). This problem will be reinforced later in this paper in a discussion of assessment and what that means for basic communication course instruction and leadership. Bendtschneider and Trank (1990) reiterated this problem when they wrote:

> The faculty and the director of the basic course ought to be primarily concerned with the extent to which the basic course fulfills the communication needs of their students. However, this is typically not one of the more important concerns of basic course directors when they develop and/or evaluate the courses offered at their institutions. Departmental and program reviews seldom, if ever, look specifically at how well student needs are being met by particular courses. Instead, the major focus for many basic course directors in the

> developmental and/or evaluation of their courses is on concerns such as course objectives and content, instructional materials and methods, enrollment, staffing, and budget. It is true these concerns are extremely important to the faculty and students of the basic course. However, this concentration on the obvious has resulted in the unfortunate tendency to assume the students' communication needs are being met by the basic course with little evidence to document our claims. (p. 166)

The future of instructional practices in basic communication skills rests in the immediate and long-term responses to this specific challenge as we enter the 21st century.

Basic Course: Service to Students

Everyone recognizes the importance of communication skill training for all undergraduate students. National university and college accrediting agencies note the importance of oral communication skill training. Business and engineering accrediting agencies note the importance of oral communication skill development training by requiring courses in oral communication skill training. One of the issues associated with this emphasis on oral communication skill is the exact content of such courses. Pearson and Nelson (1990) articulated this issue

best when they stated, "Because so many people inside and outside the discipline tell the basic course what it should be, it has become rather resistant to change and in many ways anachronistic. Like so many university courses, it is designed to meet the need of yesterday, not today, and certainly not tomorrow" (pp. 4-5).

It is difficult to imagine a scenario where communication faculty let others dictate the content of the communication basic course. It is incomprehensible to imagine that communication faculty would be permitted to dictate the course content of a beginning psychology course, a beginning philosophy course, or a beginning biology course. No one is in a better position that the "experts" in the field to determine the knowledge base and skill levels students need in specific courses. It is high time that communication educators take control of the basic communication course and, perhaps, their destiny. However, these decisions need to be based on research and data -- not personal opinions or points of view. Buerkel-Rothfuss and Kosloski (1990) pointed out the problem for us,

> To date, the research that has been conducted in and about the basic course both in speech communication and in noncommunication disciplines has been fragmented and generally non-theoretical. Although many studies have been reported, most are either opinion-based or are limited to experience with a specific program. Very few

> have examined variables from more than one basic course. Most important for this paper, few systematic attempts to integrate findings and propose a program of basic course research for the future have been made. (p. 193)

This lack of research has been and continues to be a major downfall for the ongoing development of a coherent, research-based basic course program on any campus. Basic course directors should be and are criticized on their campus when they offer courses which cannot demonstrate specific benefits for individual students. If public speaking skills are those skills a basic course director deems important, she or he should be able to document the benefits. Minimally, the basic course director should be able to document that these public speaking skills are the ones viewed to be important by employers and alumni. The real problem is that no conclusive research exists that the public speaking skills taught in the basic course are needed by employees. Nor has any research been found that documents the transference of the skills in public speaking to other communication situations. With this in mind, other communication skills are recognized to be as important, and perhaps more useful, than skills solely for the public speaking context.

The beginning public speaking basic course has been and remains the most offered, the most taken, and the most popular basic course in communication. On the surface, one could

conclude that communication educators are obviously providing the service to students that faculty, students, and employers want provided. Let's speculate about this conclusion. First, many faculty on campus are products of educational systems where the communication course they took was a public speaking course -- in the rich classical tradition of Aristotle, Isocrates, Plato, and others. Therefore, their exposure to communication studies was limited to public speaking. These same faculty also read the studies that document giving a public speech is one of people's greatest fears. Put this together, and it is easy for faculty in other disciplines to impose their wishes on communication faculty that they teach a public speaking course. Second, many communication faculty are the produce of the same public speaking basic course from their undergraduate programs.

However, there is are weaknesses in this view of the importance of public speaking education at the undergraduate level. These weaknesses result from two important factors. First, it has been documented that other communication skills are more desirable than just teaching students how to give persuasive and informative speeches. Second, Gibson, *et al.* (1990), after surveying faculty and course directors about the basic communication course for the fifth time, concluded, "Most of the instructors believe the [basic] course needs some modification, and some of the major concerns are maintaining consistency across sections of the course, the size of the classes, the amount of time available for assignments, and support budget for the

course" (p. 255). Some modification is needed -- the movement towards the hybrid communication course needs to gain momentum. Although pragmatic in nature, these concerns expressed by faculty about the basic course are real. Let's discuss each of them.

Maintaining consistency. Consistency across sections is important at two different levels in the basic communication course. The first level is maintaining consistency across sections of the basic course on a campus. One of the missions of most basic course directors and faculty is to assure administration that students are receiving the same education regardless of the section. It is difficult to dispute the importance of this need. The second level is a discipline-wide issue of staking the territory of communication instruction in the basic course. The problem is that the discipline cannot agree on specific communication competencies for students in the beginning basic course. For that matter, the discipline cannot agree on what competencies are required even when the basic course is public speaking, interpersonal communication, or group communication.

This issue might be best addressed if we look at the research conducted on communication skills expected by employers or reported to be important by alumni. A first step in consistency for the beginning communication course is identifying what skills **are** important for students to learn. If communication educators could, with some degree of certainty, identify these skills, consistency would be easier to attain. It

is difficult to suggest we know what we are doing when on one campus the basic course is public speaking, on another campus it is interpersonal communication, on another campus it is the hybrid course, while on another campus it is a course in the rhetorical tradition. Gibson, *et al.* (1990) concluded, "Sixty-four percent of the schools said that they utilized the lecture-discussion method of instruction while 22% reported that the method of teaching varied with the instructor" (p. 241). How are communication educators to develop an argument for consistency in basic oral communication instruction in the face of these data?

The research suggests that the coverage of competencies in the hybrid communication course is the area of consistency communication educators could adopt as a central anchor for instruction.

Class size and time for assignments. The size of classes in the basic course program is directly related to the time instructors have available or student performance of specific assignments. Communication educators frequently comment on the size of classes and lament because larger classes necessitate a change in the time available for assignments. Perhaps this is an inherent problem for any skill training course. It is difficult to point to any research which determined an "ideal" class size for any communication skill course. As a result, it is difficult on any campus to resist administrators' attempts (or demands) to increase class size to improve faculty-student ratios in the basic communication course. Do communication educators know the

appropriate or "right" number of students in a basic communication course? Is 15 students the right size? 25 students? 40 students? 60 students? Do communication educators know how much time a student needs to improve her or his competency of a particular communication skill? Are 3 assignments appropriate? Do students need 4 assignments? 5 assignments?

Basic course directors and faculty need to study these important issues. As Gibson, *et al.* (1990) suggested, "The basic course continues to grow nationally at a rate that is still greater than the growth rate of either the parent institution of the speech/communication department" (p. 245). Trank and Lewis (1991) reiterated this point of view when they concluded, "Enrollment in the introductory [basic] course is increasing dramatically across all types of disciplines" (p. 110).

If communication educators could identify **and** demonstrate specific student communication competencies desired as a result of the basic course, determining appropriate class sizes would be easier. The argument could be advanced that students need to develop specific competencies through repetition and demonstrate clearly the best size of these skill classes. Without a central anchor mentioned above, course directors and faculty find it difficult, if not impossible, to develop coherent and believable arguments regarding class size.

Although not specifically related to determining class size, Gibson, *et al.* (1990) pointed out an interesting descriptive

statistic regarding what goes on in basic communication courses across the country. They concluded, "The data suggest that in the majority of classes the instructors spend approximately 40% of their time in theory activity and 60% in performance activities" (p. 242). Course directors and faculty cannot demonstrate if this balance between theory and performance activities is appropriate; or for that matter, any balance between theory and performance. Any balance cannot be supported as appropriate because there are no data to report that students are being taught appropriate things in beginning communication classes.

Budget support. Without appropriate budgetary support, instruction in the basic course is impeded. The question for administrators and communication educators alike is: *How much budgetary support is enough?* Some factors influencing budgeting for the basic course have already been discussed (class size, number of assignments, consistency, lecture-discussion sections, etc.). Any approach to pedagogy is an important factor in determining budget resources devoted to the basic communication course. For example, mass lectures and small discussion sections require a different amount of resources than small, autonomous sections of the basic course. Courses requiring taping of assignments require additional resources than basic courses not using the taping option. The list of differences and their effect on the demand for resources goes on and on.

However, another variable in the budgetary issue is the

approach to evaluating student assignments. The philosophy of evaluation processes in the basic course is directly related to the budget available to manage and operate the courses. What constitutes an evaluation of a student performance? Does evaluation mean receiving direct feedback from the instructor? Does evaluation incorporate judgments on student performance by his or her peers? What is the purpose of evaluation of student performances in the basic communication course? Also, the method or methods of evaluation in the basic course impact on available resources. For example, if an evaluation model is to have faculty view student performances in the classroom for evaluation, this is labor-intensive. If the evaluation model allows for evaluation to occur in viewing student performances on tape, the resources needed are different. Similarly, if graduate students do the evaluating of assignments, whether in class or on tape, the amount of resources needed for evaluation is different. Finally, if the evaluation model for student performances permits the use of undergraduate students, there is a direct effect on the resources needed.

Gibson, *et al.* (1990) reported on the evaluation issue, "Interestingly, 58% of the reporting schools indicate that evaluation is a combination of peer and teacher feedback while 41% rely upon the instructor for evaluation. This is a substantial change from the 1985 report, when 43% relied upon a combination of teacher and peer evaluation, and 54% of the respondents used the judgment of the instructor alone" (p. 243).

Within this report is a question: *Who determines the grade?* If peers are viewed as qualified to affix a grade to another student's performance, this means a distinct difference in the philosophy of evaluation in the basic course. These kinds of philosophical differences, when it comes to evaluation, have direct influence on the budget requirements to deliver a basic course program an any college or university campus.

Other budget concerns for basic course instructors and university administrators focus on faulty resources, staffing needs, technological needs, and support resources. These concerns have been well documented in other discussions about the basic communication course.

The Future of the Hybrid Course

There are three areas to conclude this discussion of the hybrid course as the 21st century looms on the horizon. These areas include:

1) the need for research
2) the integration of technologies
3) the issue of assessment.

Research on the Basic Course

Suggested throughout this paper is a consistent theme about the future of the hybrid course. Research must be conducted on what is done in the basic course, specifically the hybrid course. Communication educators in the hybrid course must be able to demonstrate with certainty that the communication competencies taught are the ones students will need in the 21st century. The research done to date suggests that the public speaking basic course is not the one we ought to be teaching. The research suggests that we ought to be teaching a combination or hybrid basic course -- with a little interpersonal, a little group, and a little public speaking.

I am not the first communication educator or basic course director to call for such a research program. Seiler and McGukin (1989) stated, "Our proposal for the future is that we develop an ongoing systematic program of research in which scholars investigate the effectiveness of the basic course" (p. 36). In developing a data base regarding the outcomes of the hybrid course, communication educators will be in a better position to address attacks from administrators and other academic programs.

These data will allow basic course directors and faculty to determine the essential content of the hybrid course. No longer, will administrators or other faculty be in a position to dictate content of communication courses. Pearson and Nelson (1990) concluded, "In the future we need to be more proactive and less reactive. We have for generations taught what business

administration, education, agriculture, and others demand of us. ... We need to espouse our own perspective, based on sound theory, respectable research, and student needs" (p. 16). Communication educators must take control of their destiny -- especially in areas related to the basic course, especially the hybrid course.

Thus far these research projects have not been conducted. Communication educators are in not better position to defend their choices of competencies, class size, instructional methods, or philosophy of evaluation than they were in 1989 (Seiler and McGukin) or 1990 (Pearson and Nelson).

These research projects **must** be completed soon because higher education has an uncertain future and departments of communication face political realities on their own campuses. Pearson and Nelson (1990) also pointed out the lack of integration of available research on instructional methods. They concluded, "One contribution of the field has been the generation of knowledge about teaching. We have ample research on effective teaching methods, and yet the basic course remains essentially the same today as it has in years past. We must provide delivery systems which are consistent with our current knowledge" (p. 6). This is a clear indictment of communication instruction in the hybrid course (and other basic communication courses).

The challenge for communication educators is to be flexible enough to integrate research findings into the hybrid communication course. If we are to believe Pearson and Nelson,

communication educators have been reluctant thus far to change approaches to instructional practices, content of courses, and other items *in spite* of research findings.

Technologies in the Basic Course

Perhaps nothing has the potential to impact on the hybrid course (and other basic communication courses) than the continuing evolution of new technologies. Given the statements above, communication educators appear resistant to change. No greater or faster change in education exists than the influence of technologies on instruction -- especially in the hybrid communication course. Pearson and Nelson (1990) offered a warning to basic course directors and educators, "Jamieson (1990) warned that the communication field could become extinct if we do not respond to current technological changes. ... The basic course needs to address new communication patterns and relationships" (pp. 13-14).

Some technologies have been used in basic courses in the past -- computer assisted instruction (CAI), computer testing, and mastery learning through such programs as the Personalized System of instruction (PSI) appearing to be the most popular. However, recent availability of data and information on the Internet and distance learning packages will impact the basic course. These influences will occur in many forms.

First, interpersonal relationships are forming through communication on the Internet. Students are interacting with

people across town, across the country, and around the world on the Internet. The hybrid communication course is the appropriate place to teach interpersonal relationship skills -- whether in face-to-face contexts or through electronic contexts. Are we teaching appropriate relational skills for these electronic interpersonal relationships? Are we going to rely on the fact that we have been teaching interpersonal relationships for many years and the skills and competencies for those face-to-face interactions will be applicable to these new "technology" relationships? What evidence is there to suggest what skills and competencies will be appropriate?

Second, students conduct research for any assignment by sitting at their desk and calling for the information on the computer. What are communication instructors teaching students about these electronic sources of information? Even if instructors use their classical approaches to research and data collection, what are they teaching students about the credibility of information collected off the Internet? How reliable is the Internet as a source of information? How valid is the information discovered on the Internet? Communication instructors need to be prepared to instruct their students because of the influx of data from the Internet in student assignments -- both group assignments and public speeches.

Third, the creation of distance learning programs to teach beginning communication skills offers additional challenges. Students can learn course content in their home, apartment, or

dorm room. Skill development is incorporated into several of these distance learning programs. One such program at a community college in Colorado asks students to give a speech to a group of people, video tape it, and send it to an instructor for evaluation. Perhaps distant learning of communication skills is a response to the challenge offered by Pearson and Nelson (1990), "If we [basic course instructors] are to maintain currency, we must venture into new areas or treat classic areas in new ways" (p. 14). How does a basic course program integrate distance learning, if it proves a viable pedagogy delivery system? What material in the basic course can be taught and learned through a distance learning program? Can communication competencies be taught and assessed in a distance learning program? These, and other, questions are important research areas for educators interested in instruction in the basic communication course.

Assessment & the Basic Course

Each institution has been or is facing the issue of assessment. A specific area of institutional assessment is in the area of oral communication competencies. To assess students' competencies in the hybrid course, instructors and course directors need specific measures that are both valid and reliable. Prior to developing and testing such techniques, specific competencies need to be identified that can be taught in a one-term communication course. Faculty also need to determine what are acceptable levels of competence for student performance

in each of these competencies.

Another way to view assessment of student communication competence is through a Communicating Across the Curriculum (CAC) program. It appears logical, but not necessarily operational, that a beginning communication course would be an essential part of any CAC program. Once the communication competencies are identified, they can be taught in the hybrid course and reinforced in other courses throughout a student's studies demanding interpersonal, group, and\or public speaking assignments. Research needs to be completed, as mentioned previously, to determine what competencies are essential. Based on current available research, the hybrid communication course appears to be the best option for undergraduate students. This is not to suggest that communication instruction should be locked into current research. Future research needs to be completed so instruction in the hybrid course remains current and valuable to students as we enter the 21st century.

One important area of assessment is developing the acceptable levels in student performance for specific competencies -- both in the hybrid course and in other courses that are part of the CAC program. A second assessment-related area is how will the competencies be assessed. Will instructors sit in traditional communication instructional settings assessing student performances? Will pre- and post-tests of information and skill development be developed for the hybrid course? What satisfactory and proven alternatives are available for such

assessment needs?

Another important area of assessment to consider is the presentation of the communication assessment data. Indeed, institutions regardless of location, are or soon will be expected to demonstrate the effectiveness of their oral communication development plan through specific assessment data. There are many things to consider as part of an oral communication assessment plan. For example, how will a senior, ready to graduate, demonstrate her or his oral communication competence? Will there be an expectation that students make a formal presentation on some topic or research in their major and that their presentational skills be part of the overall assessment? If a student does not demonstrate "acceptable" communication competence, will her or his graduation be delayed?

Finally, the overall instructional delivery system in the hybrid communication course must be assessed. With clear and defensible goals and objectives for the hybrid course, instructors' teaching strategies and techniques can also be assessed. This is a valuable consideration in the selection and retention of instructors in the basic communication course.

With specific instructor assessment data, perhaps the emphasis on instruction in the basic communication course will change. Maybe communication departments will use the best instructors in the department to teach basic communication courses. Perhaps communication researchers will give attention to instruction in the basic communication course. These two

possibilities in orientation to the importance of the basic course are essential as we move towards and into the 21st century. With a convergence of instructional talent and research findings, instruction in any basic communication course can be both innovative and exciting. In this scenario, students learn communication *and* can demonstrate communication competence in specified areas. If we change our philosophy about the basic communication course, perhaps we can address the challenge offered by Pearson and Nelson (1990), "The basic course must continue to integrate the epistemology of multiple ways of knowing" (p. 10). In a refocused approach to instruction in the basic course, instructors can enhance the communication competence of all students -- regardless of learning style.

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